

The Feminist threat to the Church – Part II

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My previous article on the destructive activities of the dissident *Catholic Women's Network (CWN)* and their allies was published in the January 2002 issue of *Christian Order*. This update brings together further examples to demonstrate that the *CWN* is continuing to :-

- promote and foster dissent and disunity
- infiltrate and use official Church structures and channels
- receive official approval and support from our bishops

Continued promotion of dissent

A cursory glance at any issue of *Network*, the journal of the *CWN*, will prove continued promotion of dissent beyond any reasonable doubt. Most of the articles in *Network* contain statements that are contrary to Catholic teaching, but some, quite frankly, beggar belief. One such example was when *CWN* member Sr. Myra Poole, who also runs *Catholic Women's Ordination*, reviewed *The Vagina Monologues*¹ – a play well known for its sexually explicit content and use of four-letter words. Sister started the review by saying that it was a “*privilege*” for her to attend the play and that she had a “*real responsibility*” to pass her thoughts about it on to *Network* readers. She tells us that “*people have been flocking to this play in London, a living testimony to the growing influence and success of the feminist movement. If you are still shocked by the use of this word in a title of a play or, even more, as the source material for a play, then you belong to what Eve Ensler (the playwright) calls the ‘down there’ generation – the ones whose biological knowledge was cut off at the waist.*” She continues: “*The monologues open on a light note and concentrate on taking away the audience’s inhibitions and fears about saying the word ‘vagina’. This is swiftly followed by a long list of alternative names for the ‘down under’ such as ‘a fanyboo’, ‘a poochi’, ‘a poopi’ and ‘a coochi snorcher’. At the beginning a slight tentativeness in the audience is apparent, as people await the reactions of others. This, however, soon dissolves away as everyone joins in full throttle with ‘clit pat’, (i.e. clitoris patter)*”. What also seems to have dissolved is Sister Myra’s sanity and any realisation on her part of the inherent sinfulness of such “entertainment”. Call me part of the “*down there*” generation if you will, but I do wonder what happened to women religious who used to teach us the importance of the virtues of purity and modesty. Our Lady of Fatima warned that more souls go to Hell for impurity than for any other reason, but never mind – Sister Myra thinks that these monologues were “*freeing, energising and empowering*” and that she “*would not have missed them for the world*”, so that’s OK. Please keep Sister Myra in your prayers.

It was recently reported in a local newspaper² that lesbian theologian and listed CWN member, Dr Elizabeth Stuart, is to become Britain's first woman "bishop", in the newly-formed Open Episcopal Church. This report also stated that Dr Stuart is understood to have set up an Order within this "church", called the *Apostolic Society of St Bridget*. Although Dr Stuart has turned her back on Catholic teaching, she is apparently not averse to using Catholic premises. The Autumn 2002 issue of *Network* reported that she was to give a talk on the 12th October at the St Francis of Assisi Community Centre in Pottery Lane, Notting Hill, titled "*Exploding Mystery: Lesbian & Gay theology and the Recovery of Tradition*". Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor recently publicly expressed concerns about liberalism in society, but the fact that Dr Stuart has apparently got *carte blanche* to peddle her dissent on Catholic premises in his diocese suggests that His Eminence ought to get his own house in order, before tackling the wider problems of society.

As well as bizarre episodes like the above, *Network* continues to promote the work of groups such as the pro-abortion and contraception *Catholics for a Free Choice*; the dissenting homosexual group *Roman Catholic Caucus of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement*; *Seven-Eleven*, a support group for women in relationships with Catholic priests, and of course, *BASIC* and *Catholic Women's Ordination* – two groups campaigning for women priests.

Continued use of official Church channels/structures

CWN continues to use any means available to spread its radical agenda throughout the Church. Perhaps the most worrying is its hi-jacking of the *National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW)*, and the NBCW's newspaper *Catholic Woman*, which has a circulation of 61,000 copies to many parishes in the U.K, and which is run by either listed CWN members or known supporters. Because of this, the input from CWN is disproportionate, considering there are only approximately 300 CWN members in the U.K. One such example of CWN input was an account given of a NBCW day of reflection at Hinsley Hall, the Leeds Diocesan Centre³. The facilitator on the day, Tina Beattie, is a listed CWN member. Tina guided the participants through a "liturgy" that concluded with the "Wisdom Blessing" by Dianne L Neu. Dianne Neu is an ex-nun, based in America, who co-founded the dissident group *WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual)* with lesbian theologian Mary Hunt. Neu has publicly stated that "*women would never want to celebrate Eucharist in the present hierarchical-patriarchal Church guilty of the sin of sexism*"⁴. It is bad enough that "liturgies" created by such a person should be used at a gathering of the NBCW, an organisation that is an official consultative body to the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, but even worse that Fr Peter Rosser, the Episcopal Vicar for Social Responsibility for the Leeds Diocese, was present at this event and didn't challenge it. In fact, the paper reported that he "*spoke warmly of his support for the NBCW.*"

The NBCW claims to 'listen to women' but in fact it only does so if they toe the CWN dissenting line. A recent article in the *Portsmouth People* diocesan

newspaper of September 2002 titled *"Listening to Women"* stated that women from Portsmouth and Havant deaneries came together for a *NBCW* meeting, which was described as a *"chance to listen to each other and to add our voices to the views being gathered around the country in the Consultation on Prayer, Thinking and Learning and Structures."* One woman from the Portsmouth Diocese informed me that ordinary Catholic women faithful to the Magisterium were not consulted about this meeting, and that there is a preponderance of *CWN* members and sympathisers in the Portsmouth and Havant deaneries, effectively making *NBCW* meetings and activities in the area a closed shop. This may account for some of the dubious views raised at the meeting, such as *"Liturgy – we felt that women's perceptions were only heard on the occasions when a woman prepared the bidding prayers"* and *"The education of priests – we felt has benefited from having female lecturers in the seminaries"* and *"Locally we felt that women were taking responsible positions in parishes and diocesan structures but higher up the church we could see few signs that women's views were invited."*

Sunday Mass leaflets

Another area where the *CWN* influence has been noted is *Redemptorist Publications*. There has been concern in the past about the *Redemptorist Publications* Sunday Mass leaflet. This leaflet goes to many churches in the U.K. and has often contained error. It was very revealing to find out that Patricia Stoa, a listed *CWN* member, has been co-editing the Sunday Mass leaflet, which is called *Sunday Plus*.

CAFOD

CWN also appears to be making headway with the *Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)*, which is the major Catholic charity in England and Wales and an official agency of the Bishops' Conference. A full-page report was published in *Network* on the *CAFOD* Assembly held on 6.10.01 at Heythrop College, written by *CWN* member Jackie McLoughlin, who was *"asked to go to represent CWN"* at the Assembly⁵. In this report, she mentions how Pat Jones, the Deputy Director of *CAFOD*, described the vision that *CAFOD* had for the Assembly, telling them to *"put out into the deep"*. Jackie continued: *"CAFOD wants to build partnerships with Catholic organisations in England & Wales and to link with their mission. In groups we discussed ways of doing this and I suggested a campaign on women would attract the support of CWN in a very direct way."* *CAFOD* wanting to build partnerships with Catholic organisations is one thing, but *CWN* can hardly be described as Catholic, as it publicly and persistently undermines and opposes various areas of Church teaching. Apparently, Jackie wasn't short of dissenting company at the *CAFOD* Assembly, as she goes on to relate *"Networking was a key activity. I met many people I knew or recognised, met new ones and took the chance to network as effectively as I could for CWN. I met Fr Rob Esdaile, and told him many women were in sympathy with him."* Fr Rob Esdaile has described himself in print as a *"non-Mary fixated celibate male supporter of women's ordination"*⁶ and his appointment to teach theology at the Venerable English College in Rome was vetoed a while back by the Vatican after complaints from seminarians and lay Catholics, hence the reason for Jackie being

“in sympathy with him”. Jackie ended the report of the CAFOD Assembly by saying that she *“repeated a call for a campaign about women, citing the feminisation of poverty . . . Pat Jones was taking notes and said if there had been another workshop (there were 8) it would have been about women”*. I think that Jackie needn't trouble herself too much about the likelihood of CWN's agenda being overlooked at CAFOD, as she has at least a couple of fellow CWN members and supporters working on the inside. The latest CWN Members Directory lists one Maria Elena Arana on the first page, and Ms Arana gives CAFOD's postal address, telephone, fax number and e-mail address as her contact details. Also listed as being a member of the board of CAFOD in its 2001 trustees' report is Mary McHugh. Although Mary isn't listed in the CWN Members Directory, she is a known supporter of CWN, being mentioned in their journal, most recently in the Autumn 2001 issue, when she hosted part of the CWN Annual Gathering at her home⁷. Add to all this the fact that radical feminist Vicky Cosstick and listed CWN member Tina Beattie have also contributed pieces to a booklet published by CAFOD, and you can see why there is concern at the apparent direction in which all this is heading.

Network for Lay Ministry

CWN members are also very active in a group called *Network for Lay Ministry (NLM)*. The inaugural newsletter of this group, published around 1992, showed a big input from listed CWN members and known supporters like Vicky Cosstick. It contained a brief summary of the foundation and aims of the group, written by Nicky Stevens, who is now listed in the *Portsmouth Diocesan Directory* as the Head of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, in which the question was posed *“How can we as a group co-operate with the Holy Spirit to make the rigid structure of today's Church pliable to enable people to exercise their own inner authority, based on religious experience, to build up the Kingdom?”* This one sentence sums up the aims of the NLM – to replace what it calls the *“rigid structure”* of the Church with a more *“pliable”* version which can accommodate their dissenting views and behaviour, and in doing so, replace the authority of the Magisterium with their own *“inner authority”* based on *“religious experience”* as opposed to divinely revealed truth. NLM and Vicky Cosstick are still very active to this day. Vicky Cosstick spoke on the 12th October 2002 at a Study Day sponsored by the *People of God Trust*, which is part of the dissident *Catholics for a Changing Church* group, at Vaughan House, Westminster (yet another example of diocesan premises being used by dissidents) on *“The Sign We Give – Sharing our experience of collaborative ministry”*, while NLM had a piece promoting their work in the September 2002 issue of the diocesan newspaper *Portsmouth People*. This stated *“As the vision of Collaborative Ministry develops, many lay-people find it useful to meet others involved in similar work to share ideas and to offer mutual support. The Network for Lay Ministry exists to offer this at a national level and is open to anyone involved in lay ministry within the Catholic Church or ecumenical organisations”*. The contact address for NLM is Westminster House, Watford Way, Hendon, and one of the contact names is Colette Joyce, who is a listed CWN member and who also believes that she has a vocation to be a Catholic priest. Her story is featured on John Wijngaards' *Women Priests* website.⁸ If you

are thinking that Portsmouth Diocese keeps cropping up with alarming regularity, I can assure you it is no coincidence. As well as the connections mentioned above, CWN member Patricia Cox is listed in the *Portsmouth Diocesan Directory* as being an Advisor for Catechesis and Adult Formation. CWN's brand of radical dissenting feminism has achieved a much greater strength in that diocese, primarily due to Bishop Crispian Hollis giving support to such women and their activities.

Nottingham Diocesan Assembly

A recent issue of *Network* carried an appeal from CWN member Patricia Stoa for input to the Nottingham Diocesan Assembly, which is being held in September 2003.⁹ In this appeal, Patricia asked for anyone to come forward "*with wisdom to share about how to organise an effective and memorable and useful diocesan assembly . . .*" By "*useful*" one presumes that Patricia means useful to her and her ilk, but in the event, she needn't have worried about a lack of dissenting input. In spite of her lamentations that Nottingham is "*traditionally conservative*", with "*more young priests than most dioceses . . . who are very conservative*", the *Catholic Herald* recently reported that the Nottingham diocesan study programme in preparation for the Assembly, sanctioned by Bishop Malcolm McMahon OP, refers to God as "*She*"¹⁰. One parishioner who was interviewed by the *Herald* seemed to have got the measure of things. He warned that there was a very real threat the assembly would be hijacked by 'interest groups' unless more people became involved. And there you have it in a nutshell. Unless faithful Catholics become more actively involved and monitor what is happening at parish and diocesan level, the dissident feminists will simply continue to gain ground by default, given free rein by bishops who appear to have completely lost the plot. Which brings me to Bishop Vincent Malone.

Continued episcopal approval and support.

At the end of the previous article I wrote on the CWN, the Editor added a postscript giving the state of play at the time of going to press regarding CWN's inclusion in the 2002 *Catholic Directory*. At that stage, Bishop Malone allowed CWN into the Directory while correspondence between himself and the group continued. The fruits of this correspondence have now become self-evident. In the latest *Network*, there is a section about CWN's inclusion in the *Catholic Directory* and their position on the NBCW in their Annual Report.¹¹ It states that Bishop Malone wrote to CWN asking it to sign a declaration that it "*accepts the teaching authority of the Catholic Church in general, and specifically with regard to abortion, the ordination of women and the unique sanctity of Christian marriage*". Of course, any Catholic would be more than willing to sign such a statement, reaffirming support for Catholic teaching. Not so the CWN, which has, among other things, stated that it would "*try to stay in the Catholic Directory and on the NBCW*" but would "*not sign any statement whose wording was given to us*" and that it would "*only say the minimum*" and "*not engage with the three specific issues listed*". These are clearly tactics being used to avoid having to admit that they do not accept Catholic teaching on these issues. CWN sent a reply to

Bishop Malone, and he has apparently taken no action, as it later gloats in the same piece "*We remain in the Catholic Directory*". One has to ask the question – what on earth is Bishop Malone doing? Here he is faced with a small but vociferous group of women, whose dissent from Catholic teaching has been blatant and on public record for years; he is asking them to affirm their support for Catholic teaching and they are refusing to do so, and in the process treating him with utter contempt – which is even more incredible when one considers how he has bent over backwards to assist and cover for them in the past - and in spite of all this, he continues to allow them to remain on the *NBCW* and be listed in the 2003 edition of the *Catholic Directory* with "*ecclesiastical approval*"!

In their reply to Bishop Malone, *CWN* disingenuously states that the *Network* journal does not represent an official *CWN* point of view. This is clearly a ruse, as *CWN* does officially dissent from Catholic teaching - one example being the declaration of their support for women's ordination in the Autumn 2001 issue – signed with the name *CWN*. And if *CWN* does accept Catholic teaching, how come that is not reflected in *Network*? Never *once* have I seen an article promoting the work of any pro-life groups, although there have been many articles promoting the work of pro-abortion groups. Are we to believe that all *CWN* members are avidly pro-life except when it comes to what they put in their journal? This is, of course, nonsense. *CWN* tells a blatant lie when it says that it "*acknowledges and accepts the authentic teaching of the Church, while recognising that some members of the Network struggle with aspects of that teaching*". How can *CWN* say that it accepts the authentic teaching of the Church, when it has promoted and publicly supported dissent from Catholic teaching for years? It is one thing to "*struggle*" with certain parts of Catholic teaching, but quite another to wallow in dissent and promote it, which is what *CWN* has done since its foundation. If someone were "*struggling*" with a particular teaching, then the truly Catholic and charitable thing to do would be to elucidate that teaching and the reasons for it, but *CWN* never does this. How does *CWN* help women struggling with the Church's teaching on abortion, by promoting pro-abortion groups and ignoring pro-life groups? How does it help women struggling with the Church's teaching on women's ordination by promoting groups that campaign for women priests? How does it help women struggling with lesbian tendencies, by promoting groups that dissent from Catholic teaching on homosexuality? **The simple answer to all of these questions is that *CWN* does not exist to offer help to Catholics struggling with all these issues - it exists to promote, foment and spread dissent throughout the Church.** Now, thanks to Bishop Malone's sympathetic stance towards these dissidents, and his continued inaction, *CWN* will be able to carry on its work of subverting and undermining the Faith, through its position on the *NBCW*, and with "*ecclesiastical approval*" in the *Catholic Directory*, well into 2004 and beyond. As we can no longer apparently rely on the bishops to tackle dissent and protect their flocks from error, we must constantly monitor and be vigilant with regard to the activities of these dissident groups, and when they are found to be using official Catholic or diocesan properties, publications or organisations to spread their dissent, and if the local bishop fails to take appropriate action, then the matter must be reported to Rome.

We must also pray frequently and fervently – especially the Holy Rosary - that God, through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, will thwart their plans and bring their efforts to undermine the Faith to nought.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary of Fatima, pray for us.

¹ *Network* – Summer 2002 Issue No 71, page 27

² *The Daily Echo* (Southampton) – August 10, 2002

³ *Catholic Woman* – page 3 – Spring 2002 issue

⁴ *Ungodly Rage* – Donna Steichen – page 166, Ignatius press, USA, 1992

⁵ *Network* – Winter 2001 Issue No 69, page 18

⁶ Reported in the *Catholic Times*, 10th June 2001

⁷ *Network* – Autumn 2001 Issue No 68, page 21

⁸ www.womenpriests.org/called/journey.htm

⁹ *Network* – Summer 2002 Issue No 71, page 28

¹⁰ *Catholic Herald* – 27.9.02 – “Official study programme says God is She”

¹¹ *Network* – Autumn 2002 Issue No 72, pages 11-12